

# NAVRONGO CATHEDRAL

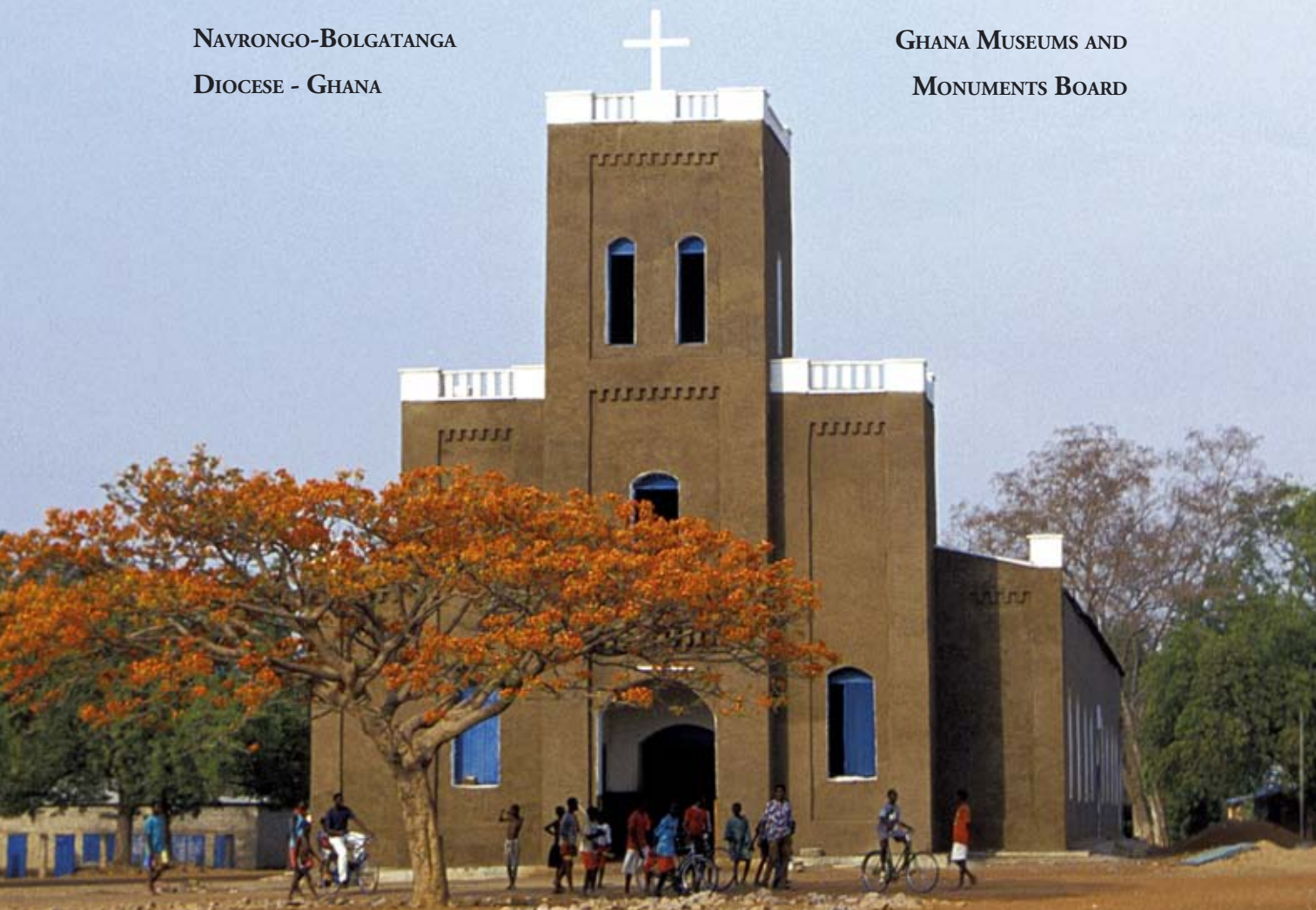
The merge of two cultures

NAVRONGO-BOLGATANGA

DIOCESE - GHANA

GHANA MUSEUMS AND

MONUMENTS BOARD



CRATerre Editions



# NAVRONGO CATHEDRAL

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The merge of two cultures

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NAVRONGO-BOLGATANGA DIOCESE

GHANA MUSEUMS AND MONUMENTS BOARD

GETTY GRANT PROGRAMME

FRENCH EMBASSY IN GHANA

CRATerre-EAG



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*Photography Nicolas Le Corre*





# THE MERGE OF TWO CULTURES

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**"Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Cathedral" was constructed in 1920 following the arrival of French Canadian missionaries in Navrongo. It was the first large building in the area, but its uniqueness also stems from the fact that it is a major witness of the history of the encounter and merger of two cultures: the Roman Catholic and the Nankana / Kasena.**

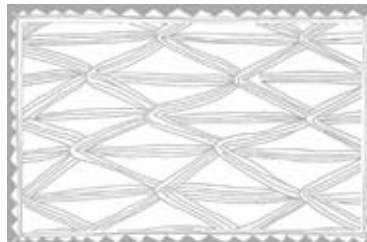
The cathedral is very clearly of European influence. However it is a hybrid structure, a mix of vernacular and western know-how, using both local and imported building materials, in a complementary mix. In 1972, the inside of the cathedral, was harmoniously decorated with the traditional techniques used to decorate dwellings in the area, mixing Nankani-Kassena motifs and symbolism with Catholic ones. These have paradoxically become the sole remains of this art at its apogee.

This booklet, which summarizes the exhibition presented in the Cathedral museum, aims at providing

information to help understand the significance of the cathedral and its decoration, its importance as a unique witness of Navrongo during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It illustrates the cathedral's history, the role it still plays as a major place of worship and as a landmark for all inhabitants of Navrongo, and also as a tool to promote the use of local skills and local materials towards a more sustainable development of housing and infrastructure in Northern Ghana.

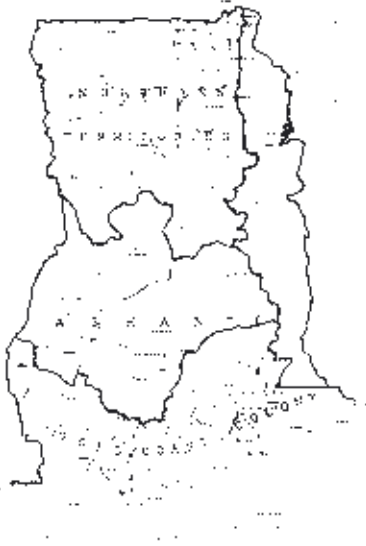
This booklet has been produced for sale to the benefit of the regular maintenance of the Cathedral.

*Photography Nicolas Le Corre*





SOULIKA.



#### SLAVE TRADING

Around 1840, slave traders like Samori, Babatu and Bagao came to this part of the continent to take people forcefully. Slaves taken from Burkina Faso, Mali and other surrounding areas were passing by Paga before being transferred to Salaga. Paga slave camp was an area of about a half square mile. At this period, a permanent spring in between the rocks provided drinking water for the camp.



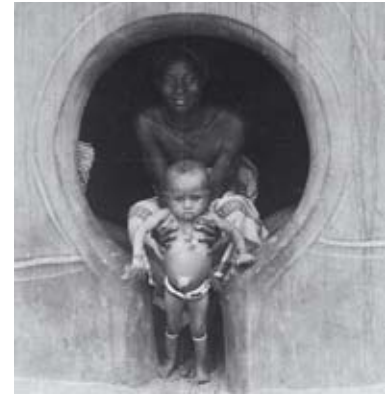
# HISTORY OF NAVRONGO

Navrongo is located south of Paga, the main border crossing between Ghana and Burkina Faso. The town lies in the tropical savannah belt, characterised by grassland with a few scattered trees.

"Navoro" is the original name for Navrongo and this name is still used today by the old people of the town. Navoro was founded in mid XVIII<sup>th</sup> century by Butu, a prince and a warrior who one day came to hunt close to the current location of Navrongo. The land was so muddy that his feet were sinking. Butu went back to his compound and said to his two brothers that he saw a good place to settle where "Na Voro". In the Kassen language "Na" means "to put your foot down" and Voro, "soft ground".

The area was occupied by both the Kassena and the Nankana. These ethnic groups had a relative independence as they had not been invaded by the Ashanti Kingdom (southern side) nor by the Moshi Kingdom (northern side).

The Portuguese arrived in the coastal zone around 1471, establishing trading posts for gold and slaves. They were soon followed by the Dutch, the Danish and the English



who invaded the Ashanti Kingdom in 1874 and declared the "Gold Coast" a British colony.

In 1897, several treaties were established with the "Northern rulers" and the British hoisted their flag in Wa, from where they could control the "Northern Territories". The following year, an Anglo-French convention drew up the 11<sup>th</sup> parallel to the North as the boundary dividing the British lands from the French, separating Navrongo tribes from their brothers living in what has now become the Burkina Faso.

Ghana won its independence in 1957 but attention was first given to the south of the country. Between in 1975 and 1985, an important dam was built to improve



food security within the Region. The Tono irrigation project counts 42 km long canals which irrigate an area of 2 490 hectares.

Since 1992, the city has been linked to the national electricity supply. Tele-communication services and television as well as improved roads and new mobility have resulted in a constant influx of new influences to the area and in a drastic change of lifestyle.



#### SOME IMPORTANT DATES IN THE HISTORY OF NAVRONGO

- 1902** The Northern territories became an official part of the Gold Coast colony
- 1904** The British opened a garrison in Navrongo. The aim was to help stabilise the region which was still dominated by tribal conflicts and slave trading.
- 1905** Bagao, one of the notorious slave raiders, was captured, faced the firing squad, and buried under a silk cotton near the present District Administration offices in Navrongo.
- 1906** Arrival of the White Fathers Missionaries.
- 1907** First meeting of the Board of Governors to establish the first school. A great number of lions invaded the district and attacked people.
- 1915** The worst year of famine. Half of the population in the district died, and some people migrated temporarily.
- 1918** The great epidemic (Spanish flu) killed approximately 10 000 people.
- 1920** As Peter Wedjong remembers, the first bicycle appeared in Navrongo.
- 1924** Colonel Withall was named Navrongo District Commissioner. He introduced the telephone (1927), and helped to build schools and the War Memorial Hospital (1935). The artisans were trained by the missionaries, and forced labour was used.
- 1940** The airport near the Paga border was built under the threat of a German invasion from Ouagadougou. Since then the airport has been used sporadically.







Decorated compound in Sirigu, a Nankana village





# TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE



Settlements in northern Ghana are dispersed over a large area with the individual compounds lying about sixty to hundred meters apart. That type of arrangement is wide spread in the geographical belt between the Sahel and the forest zone. It perfectly suits the character of the people in this area who are subsistence farmers firmly attached to independance and social equity.

The majority of house structures are circular in plan and have flat roofs. Traditionally, building is done under the direction of a mason. Friends and relatives come to help; the house owner providing food and drinks. This is generally done after the harvest is completed, between November and April. Later, generally just before the rainy season, the walls are decorated by the women.

The structure of a compound depends on the size of the family living in it. Men live in their compounds with their wives and sometimes their mothers. In addition to this, the custom is that, even if married, the eldest son is to live in the compound.

The senior man maintains the cohesion of the compound as its head.

He determines the allocation of dwelling spaces, the building of new units, and the destruction of older ones. He guards and superintends the main entrance of the compound. In the religious sphere, he is the priest of all family shrines. He acts as a moral and spiritual force that often serves to regulate the conduct of the group members.

The building materials are earth and wood. Earth is used for the floor, the walls, plasters and the roof waterproofing layer. Wood is used for the roof structure that also includes a number of columns independent from the walls. Every part of the building is made of materials with specific properties. For example, there are not less than four types of soils that are used in the structural parts.





# TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE



A traditional compound is made up of a number of individual units linked by low walls that divide the compound into a number of small sub compounds. They are higher in the animal yard to keep the animals out, and lower within the sub compounds. Stepping over a wall means entering a space belonging to another family member. The overall compound is closed from the outside like a small fortress. It is in the courtyards that most of the daily activities take place.

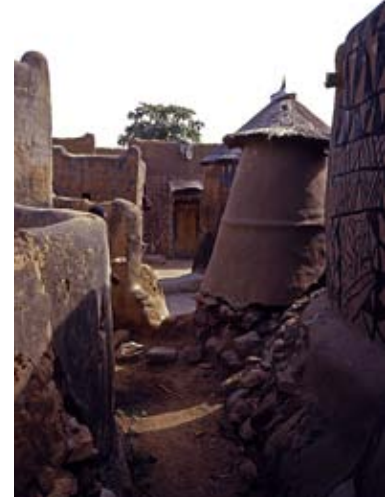
The woman's dwelling unit is usually composed of a courtyard with an outdoor cooking space covered with millet stalks, an indoor cooking space, and a sleeping-storage space. The structures themselves are round, with two rooms. The flat roof top spaces are used for drying crops, out of the reach of domestic animals, and to sleep during the hot season. They

can be accessed either via an in-built mud stairway or a traditional wooden Y shaped ladder.

The semicircular serrated "sideboard" with rounded depressions stands out as the most striking feature of the traditional woman's interior quarters. It holds a woman's prized pottery collection. The grinding platform is composed of two granite stones: the various grains are first roughly ground, and then, if necessary, ground again on the smoother stone for a finer texture. Sleeping mats are rolled and stored on rafters suspended from the ceiling beams.



Above the grinding platform are hanged a collection of calabashes.



Low walls divide the compound into a number of small sub compounds.

The man's building is made up of a sleeping chamber and an antechamber for receiving guests.

The enclosed animal yard also houses large granaries. During the day the animals are left out to graze. Each separate family section is accessible from this enclosed yard. The large granaries are supported by rocks and are covered by thatch roofs to prevent water damages. A log step ladder is used to climb and one can stand on the granary's cross log bar supports.



The woman's traditional interior quarters holds her prized pottery collection.  
*Photography Marie Schuiten*



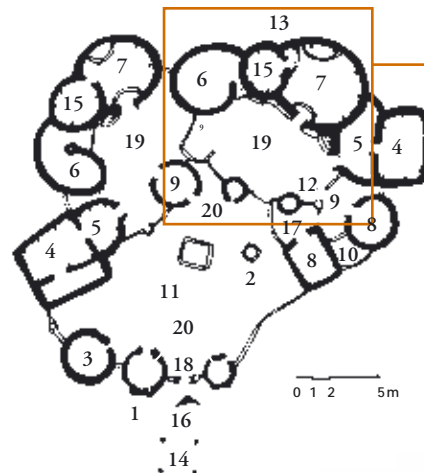




*Original drawing by Trinh T. Minh-Ha*

1. *BAGÈRÈ*: shrine
2. *BANRÈ*: small granary
3. *BONGA SONGO*: donkey pen
4. *BONGO*: a man's sleeping space
5. *BOPAKA*: a man's reception space serving as an antechamber to the BONGO
6. *DANGA*: outdoor cooking space covered with millet stalks
7. *DÈGO*: a woman's sleeping-storage space

8. *DĒTINĒ*: thatch-roofed space for an unmarried man or woman
9. *GONGONGA*: open exterior cooking area used mainly on occasions when much cooking is needed
10. *ISOARGA*: bathing enclosure
11. *NANDĒNĒ*: cattle kraal
12. *KUKULO*: a woman's granary
13. *POKA DAPURĒ*: semi-public sphere in which women grow okra, sorrel, beans or millet





# TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE



- 14. **PONGA**: shelter where the senior man rests and receives his visitors during the day
- 15. **SARAGA**: indoor cooking space
- 16. **TALANGA**: area in front of the compound entrance
- 17. **VANANA**: small packed-earth court
- 18. **YANGA**: doorway of the compound
- 19. **ZINZAKA**: packed-earth court
- 20. **ZONGO**: thatch-roofed pens for goats and sheep

**ADONO'S COMPOUND (NANKANI)**

*Original drawing by Trinh T. Minh-Ha*





With her smooth stone, the artist incise the still wet and soft decorated mud plaster.



# TRADITIONAL SURFACE DECORATION



Distinct building traditions in Western Africa have produced visually striking vernacular architecture and decoration. In Navrongo area, before the rainy season, groups of women render their mud dwellings with colourful low relief adornments. The decorations executed in Nankana villages are sophisticated and of an extraordinary quality, reflecting a high technical knowledge of the use of indigenous materials.

Wall decoration is a form of artistic expression as well as a surface protection. The incised and bas-relief designs break the flow of water rushing down the walls thus making it less destructive. The action of smoothing and polishing compacts the surface and makes it more resistant to weathering. The final surface treatment (dawa-dawa decoction) helps to render the decorated surfaces impermeable thus protecting both the paintings and structure.



This tradition is also a social event. Since it involves a lot of work that needs to be done in a short time, women gather as a team, with the most talented and experienced women leading the work. These art leaders check the mixtures of the plasters and paints and are responsible for the choice of motifs and composition. Different generations of women work together, with the older transmitting their knowledge to the younger. Apart from being an opportunity for women to express their artistic talent, the ability to decorate is seen as a sign of a woman's ability to take good care of a home.

The fragile nature of these decorations and globalisation have brought about a decline of this tradition. Furthermore, this is leading to the gradual loss of women social cohesion and identity of the community. But fortunately, this traditional art is beginning to receive international recognition as being of an outstanding universal value which hopefully will revalorise it and so encourage women to practice it in the future.







# DECORATION PROCESS

*Photography Nicolas Le Corre*



The soft white earth, "gora", which is used for the first layer of the plaster, has to be sifted to remove all vegetal matter as well as small stones.

The first layer is applied with the hands and reliefs are shaped. Then, the surface is covered with a mixture of water and cow dung, and evened

with a flat stone. On the still wet plaster, a thin layer of red laterite earth and cow dung is applied with a grass broom. This second layer is smoothened with a stone. A woman usually has a set of stones of different shapes and sizes. A good stone has an egg shape with a flat side. It allows to flatten surfaces, to fashion curves of the relief, or to incise the surfaces.

Dawa-dawa : a local varnish.

This varnish is a decoction of the locust bean pods, the branches of the "Sia" tree and the bark of the "Ampoua". The dawa-dawa is spattered on the dried decorated surface giving its nice shiny reddish patina and its waterproofing quality.



The motifs are painted in horizontal registers, starting at the top of the wall. The outlining of the designs is done in black and the spaces created are filled with either the black or dark red paint, or rubbed with the white talc stone. After the composition has been completed, the whole surface is smoothened again, colour by colour, line by line, space by space so as to avoid smudges. The wall is left to dry up to the right moisture content of the plaster. Then, it is polished once more to an extremely soft and shiny finish.





# RAW MATERIALS



“KUG PEELA”. At market where they are sold in piles of three or four, the smooth white talc stones are chosen meticulously for their purity. They are rubbed over the red laterite plaster surface giving a white chalky layer.



“GARE”. These dark red pebbles are collected along the road side outside of Sirigu in a town called Yua. Once this red mineral pigment is reduced to a very fine powder, it is added to a mixture of water and cow dung giving a rich dark red paint.

“ZIGI MOLEGO”. The large balls of dried red laterite are purchased on the market and reduced to a fine powder. Then, it is mixed with water and cow dung and used at the consistency of a thin mixture.

“KUG SABLA”. The black earth is collected from a mud pound in Burkina Faso. Large dried balls of the material can be found at the markets. Once the earth is reduced to a very fine powder, the pigment is mixed with water and gluey leaves (soro) giving a rich dark blue-grey paint.

Cow dung is always used in the plaster composition. The women collect the cow dung still fresh and let it soak in water for several days to preserve its strength as a binder and stabiliser. The mixture is sifted to remove the excess of fibers as needed.



# SYMBOLS OF THE PAINTED DECORATIONS

The designs made of abstract geometrical shapes are usually painted on a flat surface. The stylised figures - humans, animals, objects - are fashioned in relief highlighted with abstract geometrical forms and can be incised.



1. ZAALINGA - WAALINGA



2. AKUN-NYANANII



3. TANA / SOKARGA



4. WANZAGSI



5. APILIGIYETA



6. MILLET - SIMILAR TO AKURINUUSE



7. ZAALIN-NYANGA



8. AKURINUUSE



9. CALABASHES

A common repertoire of about ten painted motifs was identified in the traditional compounds. The prevailing shapes are triangles and lozenges, and the patterns are usually applied in horizontal registers.

1. ZAALINGA - WAALINGA is the traditional rope net used to stock calabashes
2. AKUN - NYANANII means "someone has many cattle".
3. TANA - SOKARGA symbolises men's cloth or old broom.
4. WANZAGSI means "broken calabash". It symbolises the usefulness of the calabash.
5. APILIGIYETA - Kin kili book represents the wings of a bat.

6. MILLET
7. ZAALIN - NYANGA symbolises the female characteristics of life.
8. AKURINUUSE means "joined hands". The motif represents schoolchildren walking on the road in straight line
9. CALABASHES. This pattern which is often represented at the bottom of the wall of the traditional houses can be seen inside the cathedral on the side walls.





# SYMBOLS OF BAS-RELIEFS

The motifs are generally inspired by objects and animals from the domestic and natural environment. Although, it seemed that there is a relatively small repertoire of motifs, there is a great variety of distinctive interpretations.



1. HUMP-BACKED-COW



2. "WAAFO"



3. WALKING STICK "DORE"



4. EEGBA-EEBTINTULA



5. "KANDIGIBA"



6. "GOLIMA GOLIMA" "AGORIDISURE"



7. HORNS OF A COW



8. BISHOP'S STAFF

1. COWS AND ZEBU "BILBA NII" prevails as a bas-relief motif, and it is surely because people owe their existence to these animals.

2. THE PYTHON "WAAFO" stands for protection.

3. THE WALKING STICK symbolises the wisdom and authority of the head of the family.

4. THE CROCODILE "EEBGA - EEBTINTULA". People traditionally believe that the spirits of their ancestors dwell in the crocodiles.

5. KANDIGIBA Pigeon.

6. GOLIMA GOLIMA or AGORIDISURE. These ridges spanning all around the compound break the flow of rain water, protecting the wall surface.

7. HORNS OF A COW

8. THE BISHOP'S STAFF was introduced as Christianity spread into the community. The Bishop is the head of the Catholic Diocese, and for that matter, he is the shepherd.

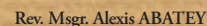
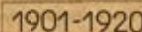
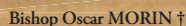


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The French Sudan had already experienced the strong growth of the Catholic Church. However, the French government had embraced a powerful policy of anti-clericalism and Bishop Bazin, then Vicar Apostolic of the Sudan, feared that such policies would reach the French colonies. He desperately tried to identify a safe haven and saw the Gold Coast as the answer to his prayers. The British Authorities welcomed the establishment of a mission by the French Canadian White Fathers as Canada was then part of the British Empire.

Fathers established their mission on what was a deserted and wild area. They first built four modest mud huts. On 1st May 1906 the first Mass was celebrated in one of them; a special day, a sense of a new beginning, a new challenge.

To gain the confidence of the people, the Fathers learnt the complex native language, the Kasem. They also visited the people in their homes, treated





First Mass of Father Apuri (left)  
with Monsignor Abatey (right)



Father Mc Coy and some of his students



malaria, etc... The Fathers gradually won the trust of the people and the Mission flourished.

The severe climatic conditions, ill-health, failures, lack of funds, lack of communication with the home countries because of two World Wars, misunderstandings with the commissioners, tested the physical and psychological endurance of these courageous missionaries. Nevertheless, this extraordinary missionary

movement continued, attracting other missionaries to come and join them.

In 1928 the first white Sisters arrived. They were mostly Canadians who taught the young girls house keeping, fabric weaving and dress making. For that purpose, they built a school in 1932, which still stands north west of the Cathedral. It was the first structure built with laterite blocks (carried by a truck from Vonania). Brother Basilide and Ludovic taught how to cut the blocks and to build with

them. At that time, cement had just started to be available in the area.

In 1933-34, as Rev. Father Morin became the Vicar Apostolic of Navrongo, the first Bishop residence was built. It is the fine two storey building that can be seen south-west of the Cathedral. At the same time, Father Robert built the grotto with stones carried from Pungu and Nayaginia.

Bishop Rudolph  
A. AKANLU †



Bishop Gabriel CHAMPAGNE †

Archbishop Peter P. DERY †



Bishop Lucas ABADOMLOORA





# HISTORY OF THE CATHEDRAL

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As a result of the constant work of the missionaries, the chapel built in 1910 could no longer meet the needs of the growing religious community. So, the Fathers began to organise the construction of a larger building, one which would remain until 2000 and beyond. Throughout 1918, discussions took place with the Bishop of Ouagadougou regarding this project.

On September 5, 1919, a letter of permission for the building came with the necessary funds to construct it, mainly from the Vatican, but also with donations from Europe, Canada and America.

By September 12, work started with the preparation of the site and the collection of building materials. The brickyard was located on the bank of the stream "Kansula", and the bricks were carried on the heads of the workers to the building site.

By January 10, 1920, the construction was started with six masons. Originally the church was a rectangular building with a flat roof inspired from the local architecture. The interior was simple with, just two rows of plain rectangular mud columns to support the roof. The plastering

and the traditional laterite floor were done by the women from nearby villages. The furniture inside the church was basic: a mixture of wooden pews and seats made of small mud bricks, and a simple wooden altar on the top of a mud base.

Many times during the construction, the fathers despaired as to whether or not it would ever be completed. For a long time the wood for the roof did not arrive and work could not progress. But finally, the opening day arrived. On August 15, 1920, the bell, hanging on a small wooden structure on the parapet wall, rang out calling the worshippers.

The church experienced many changes. In 1925, the flat roof was changed to become a pitched roof with trusses and corrugated metal sheets. One can assume that the traditional system was not so well suited to cross such a large span (almost 15 meters) and that this change had already been planned. It is at this time that arches were built between the columns. Father Lucien Melançon also designed the tower which was built in 1927. In 1934 it became a cathedral as the Navrongo parish grew to become the Mother Parish in Northern Ghana.



Since that time, the cathedral has undergone much maintenance. There are also traces of changes, but the limited information available makes it difficult to have a precise idea of what exactly was done until the beginning of 1972, when for the forthcoming consecration of the Rt. Rev. Bishop Rudolph Akanlu, the church was restored and decorated with the traditional mural paintings.

In spite of this renovation, some structural problems were observed in the late 1970's. The size of the cathedral was also found inadequate. In an attempt to address these needs, a new concrete cathedral building was begun in 1980. An impressive, adventurous structure, intended to fulfil the needs of the people, it remains uncompleted.





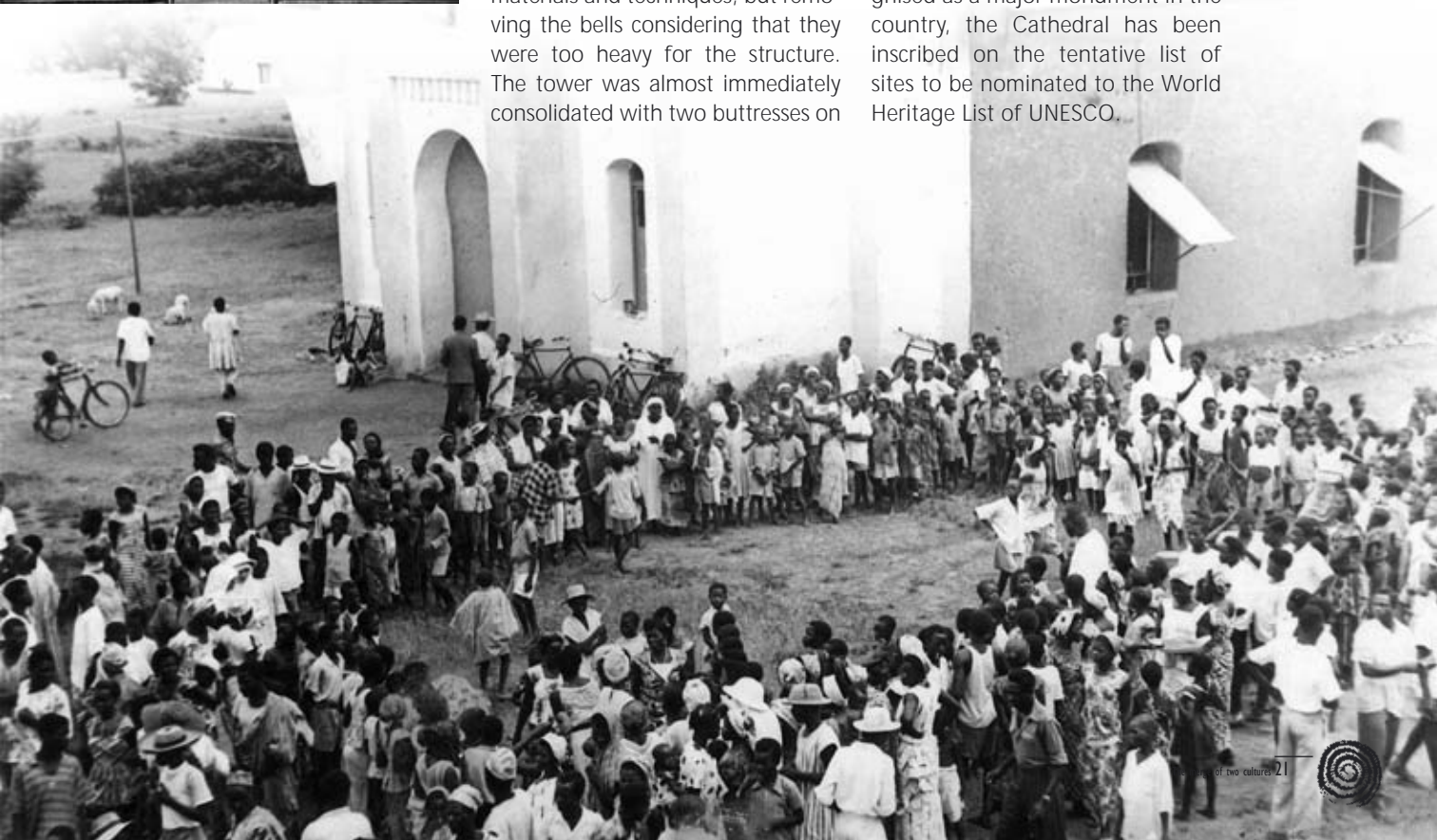
# *“Our Lady of Seven Sorrows”*



In 1992, the old cathedral which had not been maintained for long was finally re-roofed and re-plastered. But in 1993, the bell-tower of the cathedral was suspected of imminent collapse. In June 1995, the Ghana Museum and Monuments Board (GMMB) recommended the dismantling and re-constructing of this bell-tower using the same materials and techniques, but removing the bells considering that they were too heavy for the structure. The tower was almost immediately consolidated with two buttresses on

each side of the entrance. In 1996, after the rainy season, it was completely dismantled and its reconstruction started.

Today, “Our Lady of Seven Sorrows”, the last mud cathedral in the region still stands, impressive, a masterpiece of Ghanaian heritage and art. In addition to being recognised as a major monument in the country, the Cathedral has been inscribed on the tentative list of sites to be nominated to the World Heritage List of UNESCO.





# THE DECORATION OF THE CATHEDRAL

Navrongo Cathedral has its interior walls and columns adorned with a combination of traditional and new catholic motifs and symbols. Their co-existence suggests a recognition and acceptance of the different beliefs of each other.

to see such adornments applied to the interior of Navrongo cathedral.

The Sirigu women agreed to help. But before they could begin, masons were gathered to strip the old paint from the walls and the columns, lea-

Before work began, the Monsignor suggested in general terms how he hoped the decoration to be. Under the artistic leadership of Akanvole Akasise, the women worked in unison as they normally do in their communities, complementing one another with their different experiences and coming together spontaneously to create an energy and vitality which would last the next forty days.

The care and attention is obvious; the precision in detail is startling; and the overall composition truly revealing of a people whose artwork is not only considered a joyful activity, but also a way of life. It provides joy to the onlooker.

Sometime later, the decorations were refreshed. This was done mostly by applying modern, synthetic paints on the columns. Fortunately the original colours were respected and even though their aspect was changed, the original intent is still very much present.

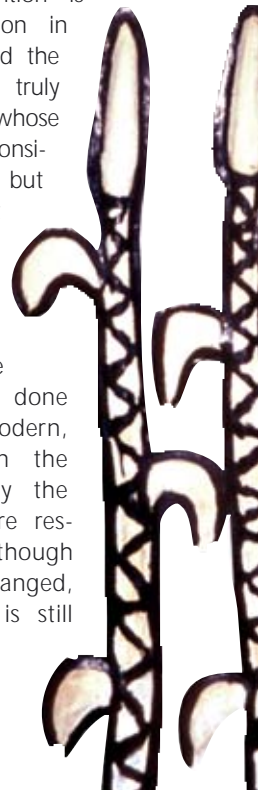


These decorations were initiated by Monsignor Kizito Aveyre who arrived in Navrongo in the early seventies. He found the Cathedral in poor condition and took the opportunity of the forthcoming consecration of the Rt. Rev. Bishop Rudolph Akanlu to repair it.

Monsignor Kizito had a strong vision of how the cathedral would be. In his previous parish of Sirigu, he had seen how the women had exquisitely decorated their compounds and the church. He wished

having a clean surface on which the women could work.

Seven women came to Navrongo. Akanvole Akasise, Adumpoka Akasise, Akansaare Akabange, Alobase Asika-Kugre, Asokiwine Apisigre, Atigesama Akurugu and Akurugo Akayire willingly gave up their time to help the Monsignor fulfil his dreams. Two young art students, Joseph Abagre and Simon Apio, from the local Notre Dame Secondary School, joined to assist in sketching out some of the Catholic figures.









# THE DECORATION OF THE CATHEDRAL

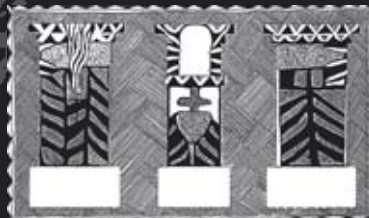
*Drawings by Dymphna Savage*



triangular  
pattern

crozier

pope's mitre



flames

sacred heart

flames



angel and  
fishermen

our lady

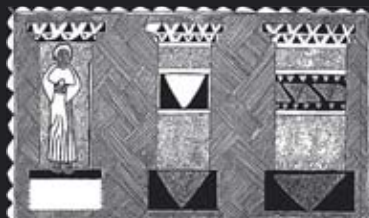
angel killing  
animal



cross

geometric  
pattern

fu-fu  
pounder



our lord with  
communion

triangular  
pattern

triangular  
pattern



our lord with  
chalice

berries

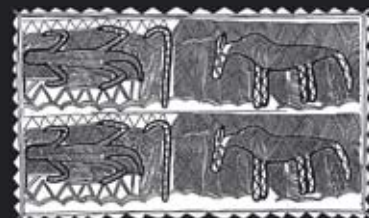
maize stalks



ghanian cow



humped back cow and egret



lizard, stick, cow



nativity



humped back cow



two lambs







## SIGNIFICANCE OF COLUMNS

The women applied traditional geometrical patterns. However on each of the columns, the decorations are a mix of local and catholic symbols.

Throughout the church the triangular pattern dominates. It represents femininity and suggests charm, friendship and love. The frieze on the lateral walls is still in its original colour scheme. Cows, sheep, snakes and crocodiles are predominant. On one occasion the hump-backed cow is shown with a small bird on its back.

The two small lambs facing each other, next to the side entrance, symbolise peace. Known locally as dogolongo, the long slender walking stick with a curved end symbolises the head of the family. The undulating wave-like pattern is suggestive of a lady's hairstyle known as dognya among the Nankani tribe.

A specific scene: the representation of a woman pounding Fu-Fu, recounts the Akan legend of original sin. A woman is pounding Fu-Fu and immediately above her are small particle-like decorations which represent God. Initially God was very close to man. However, every time the woman raised the stick to pound the Fu-Fu, she hit God and hence pushed him further and further away from the people.

At a later stage, a scene that showed the nativity was made in the covered entrance porch. This scene was destroyed when the bell tower had to be dismantled and it is during the restoration works in 2002 that the women from Sirigu were invited to design a new version of the nativity and the last supper.







# CONSERVATION

In 1980, the construction of a new cathedral was started. However it could not be completed. So that the old Cathedral is still used for mass. Therefore, it was still maintained, but this was organised rather informally by an elderly reverend sister, Sr. Bernedette Mary Yelia, assisted by some of the worshippers. In 1992, more extensive renovation works were implemented with the renewal of the corrugated iron sheet roof and the external rendering.

Despite these renovation works, some cracks in the bell tower and the falling down of some facing bricks protecting the eastern elevation of the bell tower started to worry the administrator of Navrongo Mission. Following the advice of the Ghana Museum and Monuments Board, the bell tower was dismantled and its re-construction started, respecting the original shape.



This re-construction was handled by a mason who had been taking care of the cathedral for a long time. His good knowledge of traditional techniques allowed him to imitate the existing methods. But nothing was done to avoid the repetition of previous decay processes.

Besides that, and thanks to regular maintenance, the building was just slightly affected by the presence of the worshippers, termites, and humidity. In addition, the facilities and equipment for this maintenance and electric fittings, drainage as well as bird protections were not satisfactory. There were also cracks at the south eastern angle that needed to be monitored, and windows needed to be re-designed and changed.

Finally, a number of decorations were in bad condition. They had been affected either directly by the workers or by falling corrugated iron sheets during the repairing of the roof and the reconstruction of the bell tower. The two bas-reliefs that were displayed on both sides of the entrance porch were destroyed during the dismantling of the bell tower.

The cathedral tower before it was dismantled, 1995.





Reconstruction of the bell tower in january 1997









# CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT



Apart from the intrinsic values of the cathedral that could have been enough for taking the cathedral into consideration for a restoration project, it was also realised that it had basically stood at the centre of development in the region for almost a century. This makes the conservation of Navrongo cathedral even more interesting as it can also play the role of a construction model, promoting the idea that solutions to contemporary housing problems can be found in tradition.

Here is a cathedral, built seventy years ago with sun dried mud bricks, that has stood for several decades and will stand for many more, if maintained properly. This is sufficient proof that

the traditional building technique is more reliable than perceived and not inferior or just meant for the poor. The good conservation of the cathedral can have a considerable influence on accessibility to housing and therefore on sustainable development of this sector in the area, based on the use of local materials and the promotion of local skills. This would in turn help to ensure the conservation of the cathedral itself, as having led to a revival of the know-how required for effective maintenance work in the future.

Traditionally, decorations are not maintained but changed when they reach a certain state of decay. The decorations are prone to fashion. They could be seen as “clothes for houses” that are changed at times. Even though one could be attracted to respecting

the consequences of a living tradition, in the case of the Navrongo cathedral it was found important to preserve the existing decorations. The colours, the motifs, the quality of the surface treatment and finally the overall aspect show distinct differences from more recent decorations. Navrongo cathedral is an opportunity to preserve decoration that are probably the sole remains of this art at its apogee.

Besides this, the plans of the Mission administrator to make additions to the existing decorations, as a natural completion of the initial decoration project was considered as an occasion to train younger women, in order to ensure the conservation of the know how and to promote contemporary uses of decorations in housing and also public buildings.





# THE CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

The Getty Grant program, which had made possible an inspection by members of the CRATerre-EAG, in collaboration with Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, considered the proposed conservation programme positively and made it possible through a generous contribution that complemented the efforts of the Diocese, the Mission, Ghana Museums and Monuments Board and CRATerre-EAG. At a later stage, Misereor and the French Embassy in Ghana also contributed, more specifically for the creation of the Cathedral museum.

Immediate contributions were made in 1997, to complete the reconstruction of the bell tower, including the reinforcement of its structure, but most of the activities were organised between 1999 and 2003.

The conservation programme comprised :

- restoration works on the cathedral, structure and its protective assets,
- provision or improvement of the existing equipment and facilities,
- technical research and monitoring,
- training of builders for reconstruction,
- training of surface decoration experts,
- training of a maintenance team,
- preparation of a maintenance guide,
- promotional activities,
- regular fund raising activities : museum, postcards, booklets,
- management and decision making mechanism.

This programme was successfully completed in 2004 with the official opening of the Cathedral museum and the launch of the present booklet.











# THE FUTURE OF A BUILDING TRADITION

The numerous building styles that can be observed in the area make it easy to detect an evolution in the architectural models. This is the result of the need to adapt, or the quest to improve upon the existing buildings, by looking for solutions to specific problems, be they of technical, environmental, spiritual or social nature.

In this respect, one has to consider that the traditional architecture of the Kasena people and other ethnic groups in the area is the result of a continuous evolution.

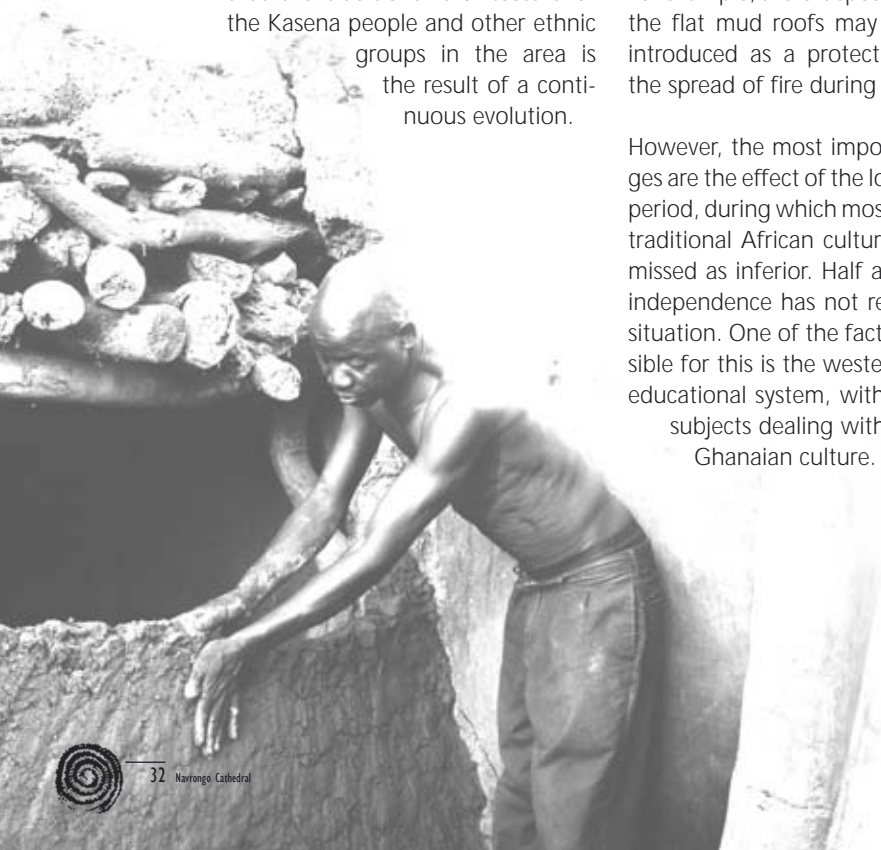


For example, there is speculation that the flat mud roofs may have been introduced as a protection against the spread of fire during wars.

However, the most important changes are the effect of the long colonial period, during which most aspects of traditional African culture were dismissed as inferior. Half a century of independence has not reversed this situation. One of the factors responsible for this is the western oriented educational system, with few or no subjects dealing with traditional Ghanaian culture.

Another aspect is the large number of Ghanaians returning home after many years abroad. The foreign influences that they bring back to the areas are eagerly copied. Most of the dreams and preferences of people in the rural areas are dictated by the "standards" set in the main cities of the south which eventually find their way, even to the remotest villages. Also, the media plays a more and more important role in the spread of influences throughout the country.

This has led to a break with traditions and the development of a large rift between the educated and non-educated Ghanaians. This is expressed in different areas: architecture, arts, music, etc. On the other hand, one has to realise that these "standards" are out of reach for most Ghanaians.



# THE FUTURE OF A BUILDING TRADITION



Eventhough the evolution in the architecture has sometimes been creative (e.g. earth bitumen plaster) the problems and prejudices resulting are numerous:

- people start building structures with expensive building materials that they can not really afford and never finish them,
- lack of consideration for traditional buildings and bad maintenance of them, which in turn increases the low opinion of traditional buildings,

- no training and lack of regard for traditional building techniques entailing some loss in the traditional building know-how,
- imitation of western, foreign building forms using locally available materials that are not suited; this leads to defects.

In addition, there is a lack of understanding by decision makers, of traditional practices, which are often seen as an obstacle to development rather than a potential source of solutions, or a base of

reflection to identify the actual needs and capacity of the people, and to define adequate areas of research and training.

Therefore, in addition to the restoration of the cathedral, it was decided to develop complementary activities. These included the rehabilitation of an old classroom block, and the construction of a new structure, the museum, wich would then also serve for demonstration purpose.





# THE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

These first two projects were very much appreciated so that a "project design" workshop was organised. It was attended by 27 participants from 21 different organisations, including Catholic and Government bodies, training institutions, NGO's, and finally some few artisans (Navrongo).

The workshop first aimed at taking stock of the current situation and identifying actual needs. It was then oriented towards the definition of specific goals and the elaboration of a framework for a strategic plan. The possible inputs of each partner organisation were evaluated and partnerships built.

This has led to the launching of a development programme called "Enabling populations from Navrongo-Bolgatanga diocese to have better access to decent, sustainable and economic shelters".

This project, to be run over 4 years (till 2005), is headed by a co-ordination committee composed of representatives of the partner institutions. It is supported by Misereor (a German catholic organisation) and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is developed in partnership with many local partners.

Project design workshop organized in 2001



The school of Kasugu built in 2003







Old classroom block, before and after rehabilitation

Museum building



### Main institutions involved in the project :

Navrongo - Bolgatanga Diocesan Development Office / Bolgatanga Technical Institute / Bawku Technical Institute / O.L.L. Secondary Technical School / Department of Rural Housing, Navrongo District / Habitat for Humanity / CRATerre-EAG, Grenoble , France

### Activities of this project include :

- **Assessment of the situation at different levels**

- housing needs
- public building needs
- rehabilitation needs
- local existing knowledge
- institutional training capacities and opportunities

- **Elaboration of technical documents**

- technical details
- specifications
- structural designs
- disseminate project results

- **Construction of demonstration buildings**

- houses
- public buildings
- rehabilitation

- **On site training for artisans**

- **Training of trainers**

- **Assistance to the local technical institute**

in implementing local technologies in their existing curriculum

- **Dissemination of the results of the activities.**



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